

Taiwan's Role in the Breakout of the Taiwan Strait Crises

A Historical Perspective

Lu Jinghua

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Introduction

After Taiwan was ceded to Japan as a result of China's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), it was ruled by the Japanese for almost half a century. Fortunately, through the efforts of the Chinese people, including both Taiwanese and others, and on the basis of indisputable historical facts, it was clearly formulated in both the *Cairo Declaration* (1943) and *Potsdam Declaration* (1945) that Taiwan should be returned to China. On October 25, 1945, the Chinese government solemnly declared that Taiwan and the Pescadores would immediately be returned to China. Unfortunately, only four years later, Taiwan was separated from Mainland China when the Kuomintang was defeated in the civil war and forced to retreat to Taiwan. Over the following sixty years, the two sides of the Strait often viewed each other as rivals, and sometimes targeted military exercises at each other. There have been three serious crises: the first Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954–1955, the second in 1958 and the third in 1995–1996. It is well known that each Taiwan Strait Crisis was, in essence, a domestic crisis occurring against a complicated international background. Both domestic and international factors led to the outbreak of the crises.

Most people would say that the breakout of the first and second crises during the Cold War period were completely different from the third one later. This is partially true, because the direct cause of the first two crises was mainly that Chiang Kai-shek, the then ruler of Taiwan, with the support of the United States, intended to launch a counterattack against Mainland China, whereas the third crisis was caused by the independence policy adopted by Lee Teng-hui, the leader who came after Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo. That is to say, the issue between the two sides of the Strait during the first two crises was which party should have legally constituted authority over China, and during the third one whether Taiwan should be separated from Mainland China. However, there is one common background for each crisis, that is, the insulation of Taiwan from Mainland China resulting from the political rivalry, military confrontation and ideological antagonism between the two sides.

The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of the rule of Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan (1950–1988) for the Taiwan Strait Crises, especially the third one after the Cold War and potential others to come in the future.

What Were the Implications of Taiwan's Policies towards Mainland China for the Taiwan Strait Crises?

Ever since the Kuomintang was defeated and forced to retreat to Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek declared that he would regain his power as the *President* of Taiwan on March 1, 1950, and then became *president* for life by ordering the *National Assembly* to revise the *Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion* in 1960. Chiang Kai-shek passed away on April 5, 1975, and his son Chiang Ching-kuo assumed the office of *President* three years later and held power until January 13, 1988, when he passed away. During the 38 years when the two Chiangs, Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo, ruled Taiwan, the government of Taiwan adopted an anti-communist policy and always dreamed of regaining power on the mainland.

The Evolution of Taiwan's Policies Towards Mainland China under Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, 1949–1988

Chiang Kai-shek declared that his aim as *President* of Taiwan was to destroy the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and recover Mainland China. Although this can be viewed as just an excuse for Chiang to regain power in Taiwan, we can see from reading his speeches that he could not accept the fact that he had been defeated by the CCP and was eager to come into power in Mainland China again. In June 1950, Chiang issued the *Notification of the Retreat of Armed Forces from Hainan and Zhoushan*, in which he put forward an ambitious plan, that is, making preparations within one year, launching counterattacks within two years, mopping up the enemy within three years, and achieving success within five years.¹ In 1952, the Kuomintang initiated and gave the highest priority to the “Anti-CCP and Anti-Russia Movement”.² In October 1952, the “Counterattack on Mainland China” resolution was passed during the Kuomintang’s Seventh Congress, the first congress after its retreat to Taiwan, which declared that the Kuomintang would launch a full-scale war against the CCP with ideological, political and military dimensions.³ On January 1, 1953, Chiang said in *To All the People* that he planned to “make all preparations to counterattack against Mainland China.”⁴

With the support of the United States and efforts of the Kuomintang government, Taiwan’s economic situation and military capability improved greatly during the 1950s. However, disparities between the two sides of the Strait in general were still large and Mainland China’s predominance was

¹ National Taiwan Research Association, *Taiwan Wenti Shilu* [Authentic records of the Taiwan question] (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2002), p. 100.

² Ma Jianli, Tan Keshen and Xiao Decai, *Haixia Liangan Guanxi Sishi Nian* [40-year history of cross-Strait relations] (Wuhan: Hubei Education Press, 1995), p. 67.

³ The Institute of Taiwan Studies of the Chinese Academic of Social Sciences, *Taiwan Zonglan* [Taiwan panorama] (Beijing: China Friendship Publishing Company, 1991), p. 476.

⁴ Li Jun, *Tai Gang Ao Baike Da Cidian* [Encyclopedic dictionary of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau] (Beijing: Hualing Press, 1992), p. 116.

becoming more and more evident. In this situation of imbalance of forces, the direct military involvement of the United States was a decisive factor. Although Taiwan was viewed by the U.S. as an indispensable part of its line of defense in the Western Pacific and an unsinkable aircraft carrier, the U.S. thought that it was in its best national interest to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. It therefore claimed that the Taiwan government should focus on self-defense in case it should be dragged into civil war with Mainland China. As a result, the Kuomintang had no alternative but to adjust its basic policy in its Eighth *Congress* to “giving the highest priority to defending Taiwan and developing Taiwan.”⁵ In October 1958, the slogan was changed from “counterattacking against the Mainland” to “restoring freedom to people living in the Mainland” in the U.S.–Taiwan Joint Communiqué issued in October 1958.⁶

In May 1978, Chiang Ching-kuo assumed the presidency. He also declared a firm stance of not negotiating or compromising with the CCP. He put forward a slogan of “unifying China by the Three People’s Principles” at the Fourth Plenary Session of the Kuomintang’s Eleventh Congress, held in December 1979, and this became his basic policy towards Mainland China.⁷ During his decade in office, the Kuomintang’s policy towards Mainland China did not change much apart from some tiny adjustments at the non-government level that would not affect the existence and development of the Kuomintang in Taiwan, such as indirect trade, cultural communications, etc. Even these small adjustments were a passive reaction to changes in relations among Mainland China, the United States and Taiwan.

⁵ Qin Xiaoyi, *Geming Wenxian Di Qishi qi Ji* [Revolutionary literature, Vol. 77] (Taipei: Central Supply Agency of Cultural Relics, 1978), p. 173.

⁶ Stephen P. Gilbert and William M. Carpenter, eds., *America and Island China: A Documentary History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 97–99.

⁷ Liu Guoshen and others, *Taiwan Zhengzhi Gailun* [Introduction to Taiwanese politics] (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2006), p. 197.

The Positive Aspects of Taiwan's Policies Towards Mainland China under Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, 1949–1988

During the almost four decades of the two Chiangs' rule in Taiwan, anticommunism and regaining power in Mainland China were their consistent goals, although the concrete contents and methods differed from one time to another. All the important political and economic measures adopted by the government of Taiwan during this period aimed at maintaining the Kuomintang's existence in Taiwan, getting America's support, continuing to confront the CCP and scrambling to exercise dominion over China. The implications of these policies on relations between Taiwan and Mainland China were profound and complicated.

It cannot be denied that the two Chiangs' policies towards Mainland China had their positive dimensions. During the period when Taiwan was under their rule, the government of Taiwan always adhered to the One China policy. The two Chiangs insisted on preserving the unity of China and opposed separation. During the first two crises that broke out in the 1950s, when the United States put huge pressure on Chiang Kai-shek to accept the idea of Taiwan's Independence, he tried his best to resist, and emphasized repeatedly that Mainland China and Taiwan both belong to the territory of China, which cannot be allowed to be divided, and set himself against withdrawing troops from the Kinmen and Matsu islands. As a result, the U.S. intrigue to divide China into two countries failed.

Although the concrete contents of the One China policy pursued by two sides were different, both of them firmly believed that there is only one China and that Taiwan is an indisputable part of China. They both watched out for the attempts of some western anti-China politicians to divide China, and tried their best to suppress any Taiwan Independence activities and "Two Chinas" or "One China, One Taiwan" arguments. On account of the accordance between the two Chiangs' position and the One China Policy pursued by Mainland China, to a certain extent the conflicts between the two sides of the Strait evolved into a special kind of "talks via bombardment," and the tensions between them tended to ease up. This was a positive outcome that it preserved the One China Principle and resisted the attempts of Taiwan Independence and international anti-China forces to separate Taiwan from China.

Negative Impacts of the Policies of the Two Chiangs toward Mainland China

In the implementation of the two Chiangs' policies towards Mainland China, great negative influences were also generated. First, the *One China* to which the Kuomintang referred to is the Republic of China, which in itself shows its hostile attitude towards the CCP. Due to the Kuomintang's failure in the civil war, almost all the political and social institutions in Taiwan were sending negative messages about Mainland China to residents in Taiwan's islands. Therefore, almost all the residents in Taiwan, whether they are native Taiwanese or immigrants who came from Mainland China after the civil war, gradually became more or less averse to Mainland China. An article published in the Kuomintang-issued *Central Daily* also pointed out:

The mistake we have made is that our political struggles against the CCP produced unexpected side effects. We have unconsciously made the whole of China unattractive, while trying to rebut the CCP. If Mainland China is really so terrible, if China is really so miserable, there will be few people who want to identify with China, except some genuine nationalists. It is very natural that ordinary people will try to find something else to identify with.⁸

Secondly, the Kuomintang adopted a series of martial law measures so as to sustain its rule in Taiwan. They totally prohibited any connection between people living on the two sides of Taiwan Strait in the name of Taiwan's security and sharply suppressed any revolutionary force or revolutionary who had any contact with Mainland China. As a result, Taiwan has been thoroughly isolated from Mainland China ever since, and all connections between the two sides have been forcefully cut off. During this period, the gap between Taiwan and Mainland China was comparable or even more serious than it had been when Taiwan was under the rule of Japan. Therefore, although the Kuomintang sustained the One China Policy, without the

⁸ Yan Yuanshu, "So-called Mainland China," *Taiwan Central Daily News*, September 14, 1987, cited in Jiang Nanyang, *Taiwan Zhengzhi Zhuanxing yu Liangan Guanxi* [Political transition in Taiwan and cross-Strait relations] (Wuhan: Wuhan Press, 1999), p. 49.

support of frequent interactions between the two sides, the policies they implemented were eventually converted into political propaganda and coercive indoctrination. Due to the lack of contact with and knowledge of Mainland China, Taiwanese people, especially the younger generation, gradually came to feel unacquainted with and alienated from Mainland China. Some of them even regarded themselves only as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, and accordingly felt patriotic towards Taiwan while losing any feeling for China.⁹

Lastly, the policies they pursued did not help to break the thorough separation between Taiwan and Mainland China owing to the conflict between the Kuomintang and the CCP. As long as the two sides were in a state of civil war, the tendency for Taiwan to be isolated from Mainland China would be inevitable, to say nothing of the impossibility of unification under these conditions. This long-term isolation provided opportunities for some anti-China politicians in the United States and other countries to use Taiwan as a tool to separate China. Some of them publicly declared themselves in favor of Taiwan Independence; some of them advocated the *One China, One Taiwan policy*, while others attempted to make the separation between Taiwan and Mainland China permanent. Whatever their claims, their real purpose was to utilize Taiwan to restrain China from unifying and developing.

⁹ Wang Xiaobo, *Taiwan Qiantu Lunji* [Collected papers on Taiwan's future] (Taipei: Pamir Bookstore, 1989), p. 182.

What were the Implications of the Kuomintang's Propaganda Against Mainland China on the Taiwan Strait Crises?

It is well known that ever since the early 1900s, Taiwan went through great tribulations and grief closely connected with China's internal and external affairs. The island of Taiwan had once been invaded by the Netherlands and then by Japan. According to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, to which the Qing government of China was forced by Japan to subscribe as the result of its failure in the war against the invasion launched by Japanese colonialists, Taiwan was ceded to Japan, which ruled it for 50 years. During this period, the people of Taiwan never ceased in their bloody struggle to defend their territorial integrity and national dignity, and write a glorious chapter in the history of the Chinese people.

However, during this period, especially the last few years, the Japanese colonialists initiated the Japanization of Taiwan, so that the Taiwanese would be converted into citizens who were totally loyal to the Empire of Japan and devote themselves to the war of invasion launched by Japan. Aside from denigrating China in schools, the Japanese rulers implemented many measures to change the nationality of the Taiwanese, including setting up training institutes all over Taiwan to teach Japanese, prohibiting Taiwanese from speaking Chinese and local dialects, ordering Taiwanese to use Japanese names and adopt Japanese living habits, etc.

It is undeniable that this kind of "Imperial education" had a negative impact. At that time, most Taiwanese could only learn about the Japanese emperor, Japanese national flag, Japanese colonial government and the Bushido spirit rather than about China. Their ideas of China came almost entirely from what they had heard from the older generation. Some people even acknowledged the Japanese emperor and took on a Japanese mentality, while regarding China as a foreign country. As for the Qing government's surrender of Taiwan to Japan, most Taiwanese could understand it, yet there were also some people who mistakenly thought of it as China abandoning the people of Taiwan. As a result, the identification with China of most Taiwanese at that time was somewhat weakened.

However, thousands of years of traditional culture could not be completely displaced by dozens of years of colonial education. Most Taiwanese still looked upon China as their motherland, which can be vividly illustrated by the scenes when whole towns went out to the dock to show their welcome to troops coming from motherland in 1945 when Taiwan was returned to China.

Unfortunately, the Kuomintang began to make extreme anti-CCP propaganda in Taiwan in order to keep its rule there ever since 1949, when Taiwan was separated from Mainland China again. Chiang Kai-shek repeatedly attributed their failure in the civil war with the CCP to propaganda, saying that the Kuomintang “neither issued active propaganda nor developed substantial theories,” and that the armed forces led by the Kuomintang “had no doctrinal belief or spiritual principles...so that it was natural to be defeated during battles with the enemies.”¹⁰ To solve this problem, Chiang Kai-shek published a series of books, including the *Basic Theory of the Fight against Communism*, *Communist Ideology and Methods to Solve Fundamental Problems*, and *Soviet Russia in China*, in order to patch together an anti-communist theoretical system. Subsequently, Taiwan's government started an anti-Communist propaganda movement. All works of art, from literature to film, were forcefully used as propaganda tools against communism. The negative images of Mainland China created by Kuomintang, such as “bandits,” “Communist tyranny,” “rebel groups,” “the bandit puppet regime,” “lackeys of the Russian Communist Party,” etc., were totally accepted by most Taiwanese because they could not get any direct access to knowledge of Mainland China after years of isolation. For example, there is a Paragon Temple on Little Kinmen Island, only two kilometers away from Xiamen in Mainland China, which is obviously intended to issue anti-communist propaganda. It is said that a nameless female dead body was found by a soldier on Little Kinmen Island in the 1950s. That night, one of the local troops received a message from her in a dream in which she said that she had been forced to commit suicide by jumping into the sea because she was being attacked by some CCP soldiers. People on the island built the temple

¹⁰ Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek], “Jundui Gaige zhi Jiben Jingshen yu Yaodian” [The fundamental spirits and principles of army reform], in *Jiang Zongtong Ji* [Collected works of President Jiang], p. 1641, cited in Mao Jiaqi, *Taiwan 30 Nian: 1949–1979* [Thirty years in Taiwan: 1949–1979] (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 1988), p. 9.

in order to memorialize the woman who would “rather die than surrender” in order to educate all the civilians and military personnel there.

There are numerous similar stories that were obviously drawn up based on the anti-communist intentions of the regime in Taiwan. As a result, the controversies between the Kuomintang and the CCP that had their roots in history were transformed into opposition and mutual suspicion between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. The feelings of repulsion, distrust and dread against Mainland China are planted deep inside the minds of most Taiwanese. Even people who had come to Taiwan from other provinces who had more identification with Mainland China also felt loathing for the CCP because of the fierce fighting during the civil war. Their experiences and feelings were inherited by their offspring, who were also therefore beset by intense anti-communist feelings. It is one of the major reasons why many Taiwanese have misgivings about the *One Country, Two Systems* idea proposed by the CCP and the unification of the two sides.

Ever since the end of the 1980s, as the tensions between the two sides of Taiwan Strait gradually eased up, more and more Taiwanese went to Mainland China for investment, trade and travel. Their fears and hatred of the CCP softened to a certain degree because they began to know the reality of Mainland China. However, it is a pity that Lee Teng-hui and then Chen Shui-bian assumed the reins of government in Taiwan. As the representatives and leaders of Taiwan Independence, they viciously provoked and intentionally made use of the Taiwanese sense of historical tragedy and the anti-communist sentiment and fear that had gradually emerged during the long period of Japanese colonial suppression and Kuomintang’s corrupt rule. Owing to their efforts, the conflicts among different classes were converted into the contradiction between local people in Taiwan and Mainlanders, the competition between the traditional culture of Taiwan and the culture of China, and even evolved into a contest between a “Taiwanese mentality” and a “Chinese mentality.” From their words and deeds we can see that their real aim was to establish a new country in Taiwan.

What were the Implications of the Kuomintang's Corrupt Rule in Taiwan?

When Taiwan was returned to China in 1945 after Japan's surrender, the Kuomintang government, which was the government of China at that time, dispatched many government officials and military officers to Taiwan. Some of them took bribes and corrupted justice in pursuit of luxury and oppressed the common people; they did not try to change these vices when they came to Taiwan. The Taiwanese were so disappointed by their behavior that some of them even regarded them as worse than the Japanese. Unfortunately, soon after Kuomintang took over Taiwan, the Taiwanese were severely hurt by "the 2-28 Incident," also called "the 2-28 Massacre," that broke out because of the Kuomintang's improper administration. On February 28, 1947, a political transformation was initiated on Taiwan aimed at realizing a political transformation and eliminating autarchy and corruption. However, the Kuomintang government saw it as a movement aimed at overthrowing the government, seizing power and betraying the country. With the fierce suppression of this movement, many well-known as well as ordinary people in Taiwan were arrested, and thousands of them lost their lives. This incident compelled some Taiwanese to go to extremes in opposing the government, which became a major factor in the emergence and development of the Taiwan Independence movement.

The story of the father of Peng Ming-min (who is regarded as the father of the Taiwanese Independence movement) may serve as a case in point. He was actually the chairman of the welcoming committee when the Kuomintang troops arrived in China and was serving as Chairman of the Kaohsiung Settlement Committee at the time of the 2-28 Incident. He led a group of representatives to the Kaohsiung garrison headquarters for a consultation. When one of the representatives burst out into a tirade against Chiang Kai-shek and Chen Yi, he was seized, tortured and shot to death. Peng Ming-min's father was so disillusioned with the Kuomintang following this incident that he declared himself ashamed of his Chinese blood and wished for his descendants to marry foreigners until they could no longer be considered Chinese. His father's bitter experiences must have been a

factor in Peng Ming-min eventually becoming a leader of the Taiwan Independence movement.

When the Kuomintang government retreated to Taiwan after its failure in the civil war, the government led by Chiang Kai-shek adopted the so-called Martial Law System in order to deal with issues of public security and to suppress the opposition from the people of Taiwan. The government did not abolish this system until 1987, one year before Chiang Ching-kuo passed away. For 38 years, the Taiwan government adopted undisguised methods of terror and despotism. It set up a large-scale secret police with branches everywhere in Taiwan, from bureaucracies to military systems, from schools to almost all the areas of society, so as to make sure that all the words and deeds of all the people in Taiwan were under their surveillance. The government also issued a series of laws, including the *Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion*, *The Espionage Prevention Act of the Period of Suppression of Communist Rebellion* and *Prohibitions and Restrictions on Wartime Publications*. During this period, the security, freedom democracy and almost all other basic rights of the people in Taiwan were deprived.

In a sense, "Taiwan Independence" in its early stage was an extreme method of opposing the dictatorship the Kuomintang government imposed on the people of Taiwan. Lin Jin, a famous Chinese specialist on Taiwan, wrote:

The direct and fundamental driving factor in the emergence of Taiwan Independence thought was the reactionary policies of the Kuomintang government after it took over Taiwan. The ideological movement for Taiwan Independence would not have been able to found a climate in which it could take shape or found fertile soil to develop, if Taiwan had been able to realize democracy, development and prosperity as the people of Taiwan wished after casting off Japanese colonial rule and returning to China. From this perspective, the emergence of Taiwan Independence thought is inevitable.¹¹

¹¹ Lin Jin, "Luelun Taidu Sichao de Lishi Genyuan" [Brief discussion on the socio-historical root of Taiwan independence ideology], in Zhu Tianshun, ed., *Dangdai Taiwan Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [Studies on contemporary Taiwanese politics] (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 1990), p. 188.

The Kuomintang government's policy of discriminating between those whose origins were on the Mainland and the native Taiwanese deprived the locals of political rights, which resulted in an invisible chasm emerging between the two groups. Although many of the immigrants from the mainland were actually in a socially disadvantageous position, the local masses resented them as a group, because all the important political, economic and military powers of Taiwan were controlled by a few Kuomintang officials and officers who had retreated from Mainland China. To this day, the tension between the immigrants from the Mainland and the local Taiwanese remains one of the most powerful factors conducive to the Taiwan Independence movement.

Concluding Remarks

On the one hand, during the period from 1949 to 1988 when Taiwan was ruled by the two Chiangs, the Kuomintang government suppressed Taiwan Independence activities in Taiwan without any appeasement. As a result, all the Taiwan Independence organizations and activities were repressed, and the breakouts of both major Taiwan Strait Crises during this period were due to the contention as to which party should represent and control the whole of China. From this perspective, we must say that the government of Taiwan never sought independence from Mainland China when it was under the rule of the two Chiangs, which is a very important factor to avoid the isolation of Taiwan from Mainland China, and to avoid the extreme intensification of Taiwan Strait Crises.

On the other hand, however, Taiwan Independence thought had never been totally cut off. With the separation between the two sides of Taiwan Strait, the extreme propaganda against the CCP and Mainland China, and the corrupt rule of the Kuomintang government in Taiwan, as soon as the arbitrary rule ended in the late 1980s, Taiwan Independence thought finally resurged in Taiwan in the name of opposing the autarchy of the Kuomintang government and reunification with the CCP, and was rapidly accepted by some ordinary Taiwanese people who don't know much about Mainland China, which became the main driving factor of the third Taiwan Strait Crisis and the tensions between the two sides since the 1990s.

Of course, what must be pointed out is that, although the Kuomintang cannot escape blame for the emergence of the Taiwan Independence movement, the support and help of international influences, especially in the United States and Japan, was the most important driving factor in the emergence and development of Taiwan Independence.

In the final stage of World War II, voices were heard in the United States that Taiwan should be recognized by the United Nations. In the 1950s, the U.S. government put forward the idea of the "undetermined status of Taiwan," in total defiance of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations, with the aim of counterbalancing and weakening China. The U.S. government also brought pressure to bear on the Kuomintang government to loosen its restrictions on Taiwan Independence, while also supporting the rule of the Kuomintang

authorities in Taiwan as a bargaining chip, so as to create opportunities for Taiwan Independence forces to come back to and develop in Taiwan. In the 1980s, anti-China western forces, especially the United States, put forward the idea of the "pending sovereignty of Taiwan." In the 1990s, the former U.S. ambassador to China James R. Lilley even put forward the idea of "China's outdated view of Taiwan's sovereignty," which was simply an absurd argument. Moreover, the United States and Japan were actually the breeding ground and focal point of the Taiwan Independence movement forces. In the early 1950s, many exiled members of the Taiwan Independence movement gathered in Japan with the support of the Japanese government. From then on, the anti-China policy adopted by the U.S. government gave new energy to the Taiwan Independence activities, which had been shrinking. Numerous so-called non-Kuomintang elites came to the United States and many Taiwan Independence organizations chose the United States as their base. With U.S. support, the Taiwan Independence movement developed rapidly, in spite of the two Chiangs having declared the Taiwan Independence movement illegal and suppressed it severely.

About the Author

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